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# THE DYNAMICS OF XENOGENETICS AND SECTRANRIANISM IN LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR: A STUDY OF NIHILISM AND SCIENTIFIC UPHEAVAL

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THE DYNAMICS OF XENOGENETICS AND  
SECTRANRIANISM IN LOVECRAFTIAN  
HORROR: A STUDY OF NIHILISM  
AND SCIENTIFIC UPHEAVAL

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

In

English Composition

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by

Brandon Linn-Spendi Matsalia

March 2014

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Approved by

Dr. Chad Luck, Committee Chair, English

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis project is to affix the attention of Lovecraftian scholarship on the oft ignored racism that pervades many of H.P. Lovecraft's better known short stories. Existing scholarship revolves around an inordinate focus on the cosmic aesthetic of Lovecraftian horror and Lovecraft's professed nihilism. The consequence of such criticism is that similar critical readings are produced, contributing to a rhetorical atrophy that prohibits the possible depth of scholarly inquiry. Indeed this limitation is made apparent by the small pool of scholars that produce the majority of Lovecraft scholarship.

I seek to broaden the current discourse, and thus invite additional scholarly voices, by introducing a critical lens that allows readers to rethink Lovecraftian horror from a new perspective. Whereas most Lovecraftian scholarship relies on a biographical lens with which to interpret Lovecraft's works, I will be combining biographical insight with historical context to create a new framework from which readers can address the racism found in Lovecraft's works in relations to external influences and paradigms.

My methodology consists of historicizing Lovecraft and his works within the White racist power structure that defined not only the interaction of Whites and non-Whites, but the collective mindset of contemporaneous White American culture. Specifically, I will introduce three of Lovecraft's stories as part of a broader social discourse on race and ontology. The stories in question are "The Call of Cthulhu", "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn" and "Hebert West: Re-Animator".

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| ABSTRACT .....  | iv |
| CHAPTER ONE: I'LL BE A MONKEY'S UNCLE.....                  | 1  |
| CHAPTER TWO: IT'S A HUMAN RACE AND<br>WE'RE ALL LOSING..... | 26 |
| Miscegenation.....  | 30 |
| Ontology.....   | 39 |
| CHAPTER THREE: Madder than the Hatter .....                 | 48 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY .....  | 77 |



## CHAPTER ONE

### I'LL BE A MONKEY'S UNCLE

H.P. Lovecraft's xenophobic proclivities are well known, yet few scholars explore the significance of the racism present in his oeuvre. It is my contention that this aversion to addressing the racism in Lovecraft's stories is to the detriment of Lovecraftian scholarship. Horror and racism are an inextricable binary in Lovecraft's stories. Any criticism directed toward the themes in Lovecraft's work cannot omit Lovecraft's racism, or position it as ancillary, lest it risk obfuscating the pervasive impact that racism has on Lovecraft's canon. In order for the reader to rethink how fear functions in Lovecraft's horror tales, it is paramount to move the critical conversation away from the discussion of the cosmic aesthetic of Lovecraftian horror and reorient the discussion around the aforementioned binary.

During the first two and a half decades of the 1900s, the burgeoning fear of racial coalescence became the subject of scholarly debate, political policies, film, and

more pointedly, Lovecraft's stories. The prevailing supposition is that commingling would not merely dilute the White ethnic identity, but destroys it entirely through genetic corruption. As portrayed in stories such as "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", hereditary degeneration is the poignant corollary of miscegenation. The taint of a parent can be passed down the family line, irrevocably and even visibly corrupting the family line. Consequently, many of the grotesque entities featured in Lovecraft's menagerie of *lusus naturae* are terrifying not because of their ethereal origin, but because they signify the gruesome product of interracial union.

I endeavor to displace the perception that all Lovecraftian horror is derived from a place of nihilism and supplant said perception with the argument that Lovecraft's stories serve as an allegory for White society's anxiety about racial homogenization. In doing so, I believe that Lovecraft's works may be used as a lens to examine the White cultural mindset and how said mindset perpetuated a culture of segregation and fear, not just in terms of physical space, but genetic division. Historicizing Lovecraft's works will provide a lens with which to

extrapolate new interpretations of Lovecraft's texts beyond their preternatural conventions, eroding the barrier between author and text and revealing the nature of Lovecraft's works as his contribution to a much larger societal conversation on racial mixing. To facilitate this critical reading, I will be referring to three of Lovecraft's fictive texts as well as several pieces of his personal correspondence. Of his fictive texts, I will be reading "The Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jerymn", "Herbert West: ReAnimator" and "The Call of Cthulhu." In this essay I will employ two key events as the contextual framework; the discovery of the Piltdown Man and the Scopes trial. Both of those events contributed to an environment in which past assumptions about racial stratification and human ontology were questioned and challenged as being erroneous or incomplete. To ensure the cohesiveness of this project, I will be limiting the scope of this study to a period of time ranging from 1915-1925. It is during said decade that seeds of racial disparity blossomed into the fruits of racist hysteria as a new social paradigm unfolded.

Racial integration, a nascent development at the turn of the twentieth-century, was met with rancor, resistance

and trepidation from White Americans. Seen as the antecedent of the destruction of the White race, anti-integration sentiment became a perennial thread in the cultural discourse of White America. I find that Lovecraft's views align with said discourse. In a 1915 missive to Reinhart Kleiner, Lovecraft conveys both his belief in White superiority and his disdain for racial mixing;

... the only non-Saxons were niggers whose parents work for our families or cart our ashes, and who consequently know their place. Imagine, then, my feeling of entering high-school and being confronted with [Jews] how could a child used to other children like himself find anything in common with hook-nosed, swarthy, guttural-voiced aliens? [...] Oil and water are both desirable, but they will not mix. And the more I study the question, the more firmly I am convinced that the one supreme race is the Teuton. (Joshi, Schultz 63-64)

Lovecraft's vituperation is not idiosyncratic.

Outspoken eugenicist Madison Grant, who is himself known for espousing similar beliefs about White superiority, echoes Lovecraft's apprehension about racial

mixing. In his 1916 text, The Passing of the Great Race, Grant not only refers to non-Whites as being inferior, but he claims that "whether [White people] like to admit it or not, the result of the mixture of two races, in the long run, gives us a race reverting to the more ancient, generalized and lower type" (15-16). Perhaps the most scathing indictment against miscegenation comes from the influential 1915 film, *Birth of a Nation*.

... The narrative [of the film] pivots on the notion of blurring categories through miscegenation.... The tensest narrative set pieces--Gus's pursuit of Flora, Silas's proposal to Elsie-- concern acts whose violence expresses the horror of the interracial mingling of blood as much as of male domination of women. In the racist imagination, miscegenation is rape. (University of Virginia)

Equating miscegenation with rape is to insinuate that interracial sex is intrinsically a violent act, which highlights an overlap between fear and the act of sex itself and not just the product of sex.

Author and critic Ben P. Indick argues that "the common path in a Lovecraft horror tale is for the narrator or for the subject to find within themselves the taint

which will destroy them" (Schweitzer 81). For Lovecraft, sex in general is a violent act of destruction because of the risk of transmitting undesirable qualities. That miscegenation is anthropomorphized in the form of violent, abstract monstrosities shows the greater level of distress that is brought on by the thought of sex occurring between interracial couples. Moreover, the idea that interracial sex is monstrous gives insight into how White society viewed non-Whites as being inhuman.

The 1916 lynching of Jesse Washington, a Black farm-hand inculpated for raping and murdering a Lucy Fryer, a White woman, exemplifies the inhuman treatment suffered by those even assumed to be involved in interracial sex. With no witnesses and a dubious confession, Washington was found guilty of sexually violating and killing Fryer. Before the judge could issue a formal sentence, Washington was dragged from the court house, beaten, repeatedly stabbed, had his genitals mutilated and was hanged from a chain, all while conscious. Washington was then doused in gasoline and lowered into a fire while still alive, culminating in his tortuous death. Thousands of people attended this gruesome event (Blumenthal). What Washington's excruciating murder relays is a congruency between reality and Lovecraft's

paracosms. Whereas Lovecraft creates worlds filled with inconceivable creatures meant to give form to his fears, the real world, from a racist perspective, is actually filled with such horrors. Jesse Washington, to a racist, is no less reviled and menacing than Cthulhu.

Avowal of the racist subtext found in much of Lovecraft's work is not as common as the aggrandizing critiques that comprise the bulk of the field of Lovecraftian scholarship. Horror-scribe Fritz-Lieber Jr. posits that "[Lovecraft] shifted the focus of supernatural dread from man and his little world and his gods, to the [...] gulfs of intergalactic space" (Schweitzer 4). Lovecraft himself ostensibly affirms the above claim:

... all my tales are based on the [...] premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large [...] all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have [no] existence at all". (Joshi, Schultz 51)

Famed fantasy author Michael Moorcock extends a far less amiable approach to Lovecraft's works, castigating him for his racism.

Lovecraft is morbid. His work equates to that negative romanticism found in [...] Nazi art. He was a confused anti-Semite and misanthrope, a promoter of anti-rationalist ideas about racial 'instinct' which have much in common with Mein Kampf. A dedicated supporter of 'Aryanism' [...] Lovecraft appeals to us primarily when we are ourselves feeling morbid. (195)

Moorcock's effusion denotes that the racist ideas that shape Lovecraft's writing have not eluded all critical attention. More pointedly, Moorcock plainly communicates that Lovecraft knowingly infuses his works with his racial prejudices.

Consider the short story "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", a tale steeped in anti-miscegenation themes and rhetoric. The antagonists of the story are a maligned people whom are revealed to be an admixture of human and alien. Despite their alien parentage, this inhuman brood possesses strikingly ethnic features reminiscent of the phenotypical stereotypes of Black Americans. A passage describing the townspeople reads, "there certainly is a strange kind of streak in Innsmouth folks today [...] some of 'em have narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy stary eyes [...]." Even though the denizens of Innsmouth are half White, mixing has



made them a non-White other. If that unsubtle allusion is not enough to discern the racist intent of the story, a previous passage makes it quite clear to the reader that these mixed-race beings are unacceptable;

... the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply racial prejudice-- and I don't say I'm blaming those that hold it. I hate those Innsmouth folk myself, and I wouldn't care to go to their town. (The Call of Cthulhu and Other Dark Tales 348)

The apologetics for racism in the above passage pales only to the dubious depiction of the Innsmouth people. The given description of the people invokes the image of Negroid features, but latter parts of the narrative mark them as being less than human. With respect to Moorcock's statements about Lovecraft's works, the above analysis confirms the overtly racist nature of Lovecraft's stories.

The relevance of racial distinction is the pivotal issue surrounding the validity of the claim of White superiority. Though Darwinism is seen as the affirmation of White supremacist suppositions, I observe Darwinism to have been unable to ably support any claims of White superiority because of Darwinism's inability to prove the significance of racial variation. In the book, The Retreat of Scientific

Racism, renowned human rights scholar Elazar Barkan explains that shortly after the first World War (which ended on November 11th 1918),

... the American [anthropological] scene was saturated with racism of different kinds [...] it is difficult to locate non-racist views, since race was viewed as a scientific fact both in its philosophical and popular versions. This was evident in the prevailing terminology in numerous debates which saw Darwinism replacing other religious metaphysics. (66)

Despite the growing acceptance of Darwinism, there is no unanimity about Darwinism's view of race. Anthropologists from the polygenist school of thought did not agree with evolution and instead adhered to the belief that different species were the result of separate origins. Conversely, anthropologists from the monogenist school of thought fell more in line with evolutionary rhetoric, believing all humans belong to the same species. The conundrum then lies with whether or not Darwinism defines race as a separation of species or as a separation of human groups within a species (Barkan 17, 18). On the matter of racial stratification, Darwin writes,

... at some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world. At the same time the anthropomorphous apes [...] will no doubt be exterminated. The break between man and his nearest allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilized state, as we may hope, even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as now between the Negro or Australian and the gorilla. (Darwin 156)

Darwin's assertion positions non-Whites as being of the same species as Whites, yet still inferior because of their supposed proximity to lower apes. Consequently, that line of thought still creates a space for separation between the races. Furthermore, Darwin's postulation of the inevitable genocide of the "savage races" at the hands of the "civilized races" marks the presence of White supremacist thinking. If race is categorized as a species, then the rift between Whites and non-Whites is justified through the humanization of Whiteness and the dehumanization of non-Whiteness. On the other hand, if race is a separation of human groups and not species, then Whites are no longer

able to claim the sole distinction of being human and consequently lose their position of privilege. Given that Darwin concedes that all races are of the same species, Darwinism evades the caveat of its rhetoric through the use of racial castes. The Darwinian argument may then be attenuated if there is proof of a common ancestor that establishes a close primitive relation between Whites and said ancestor.

Amateur archaeologist Charles Dawson presented what he claimed to be the missing link between humans and apes. Though Dawson's find would later prove to be fraudulent, at the time of the discovery, this missing link would prove to complicate the very definition of what it means to be human. The unearthing of a missing link is simultaneously an act of vindication and division. On one hand, the discovery made Darwinism a more plausible theory. On the other hand, some of the racist implications of Darwinism were undermined by the presence of a missing link. Ultimately, it comes down to how the discovery is interpreted. Between the years 1912 and 1913, on the grounds of Barkham manor in Sussex England, Charles Dawson F.S.A. and several of his colleagues unearthed a mandible and other bones that were said to be the remains of a

creature that linked man to ape (Walsh xv). These remains came to be referred to as the Piltdown Man, so named because of the location of their discovery. With the discovery of the Piltdown bones, Darwin's evolutionary rhetoric finally seemed to have gained the necessary validation to be seen as a legitimate explanation for human life and not just a postulation.

English paleontologist and Dawson's cohort, Arthur Smith Woodward, proclaimed that "[...] the Piltdown remains wonderfully established the truth of the old idea. Our discovery [...] confirms in a striking manner the theories of science.'" (Walsh 33) Subsequently, newspapers around the world echoed Woodward's proclamation:

... newspapers in England and most other countries blared to readers the sudden arrival on the world's stage of a pe-jawed but clear-eyed Piltdown Man, the missing link. FIRST EVIDENCE OF A NEW TYPE, a headline in the London Times proclaimed. (Walsh 33)

Though it seems evident that the Piltdown fossils are definitive proof of a connection between man and ape, the discovery only further complicated matters by exacerbating the same points of contention already present in existing evolutionary debates.

Evoking the clash between polygenist and monogenist anthropologists, Elliot Smith and Arthur Keith, two more of Dawson's cohorts, would go on to have a similar debate over the matter of divergent origins versus a single origin.

The debate over the Piltdown Man led Keith and Elliot Smith into a controversy and animosity that never subsided. The conflict manifested in the use of each made of the findings to enhance a different theory of evolution and of racial differentiation. (Barkan 42) Keith proposed the notion that the Piltdown Man proved that mankind has disparate origins, while Smith supported the idea that the Piltdown remains demonstrated the unified antiquity of human descent. Of the reverence he has for the Piltdown discovery, Smith states:

... If the introduction of a hitherto unknown and exotic relative into the family circle increases our pride in the length of our ancestry and the variety of our kinsmen, it is also a useful discipline in humility in reminding us what strange and uncouth cousins of ours once roamed the world, unknown to us and to our immediate predecessors. (Barkan 43)

Darwinism is seemingly compromised by this ontological debate, as it reestablishes the quandary that Darwin

attempted to evade through the application of racial stratification. I believe that this issue contributed to the question of whether or not the teaching of Darwinism should be allowed in public schools. If Darwinism is taught in schools, the unsettled debate stands to undermine the legitimacy of White supremacy. However, if Darwinism were to be disavowed, then a different source of authority would be needed as a foundation in order to perpetuate the justification of White supremacy.

I believe that the state of Tennessee, through the use of legislation, made a concerted effort to dismiss Darwinism while maintaining the power dynamics of White supremacy. To achieve success in this endeavor, Tennessee sought to return Christianity to the forefront of the conversation about ontology, an act that supplants the authority of Darwinism with the authority of religiosity. On January 28th, 1925, the lower house of the Tennessee Legislature passed the Butler bill, known as the Tennessee anti-evolution act. By March 21st of 1925, the act was signed into law by the State Governor, Austin Peay. The act explicitly forbids any university or primary level instruction in evolution theory at any institution that is funded wholly or in part by the State of Tennessee. More

specifically, the act requires that any teaching about ontology be taken directly from the creation account as told in the book of Genesis;

... it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the state which are supported in whole or in part by the public schools fund of the State to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.

(Grebatein 3)

The reason why I have concluded that Tennessee's efforts are driven by racism is because of the way in which the Biblical account of creation can be used to justify White supremacy when applied to the assumption that non-Whites are closer to animals than Whites. The book of Genesis states that

... God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Grebstein 5)



The edict issued in Genesis gives man rule over the lesser creatures of the planet. By humanizing Whiteness and dehumanizing non-Whites, there is room to create a dialog in which the Bible can be used as an authoritative source that supports the "right" of Whites to subjugate non-Whites based on the premise that non-Whites are sub-human.

There is a historical precedent which marks the prior use of the Bible to justify race based cruelties such as slavery. This antecedent can be seen through the once widespread use of the "Curse of Ham" from the book of Genesis, which became the justification for the enslavement of Blacks in the Americas and other regions (Goldberg 170). I do not believe it to be unreasonable that the Bible could again be used as a means to justify White superiority. From slavery to segregation, America's social order has been defined through racism. The Bible has very much been a part of maintaining that order through the abuse of religious doctrine. I argue that the Tennessee anti-evolution act is less about the defense of Christianity's validity and is more about defending Christianity as a tool for enforcing racist privilege. Given that dynamic, I believe that racial politics were the unspoken agenda of the Scopes Trial, the

first and historically noteworthy violation of the Tennessee anti-evolution act.

John Thomas Scopes, a science teacher and football coach for Dayton high school in Dayton Tennessee, taught the subject of biology. Just a bit over a month after Governor Austin Peay signed the Tennessee anti-evolution act into law, Scopes was charged with being in violation of the new law. On May 5th, 1925,

... George W. Rappelyea, a resident of Dayton, Tennessee, with the reluctant consent of F.E. Robinson, the head of the county school board [and] Walter White, county superintendent of schools...propose[d] to make the Butler Act a test case by swearing out a warrant against Scopes for teaching evolution in his biology classes. (Grebstein 1)

Two days later on May 7th, 1925, John Scopes was arrested for the charge of violating the anti-evolution act. Scopes would be formally charged for the offense on May 25th, with the trial being set for July 10th, 1925. It would not seem necessary to require a public trial for a misdemeanor offense, but much was at stake with the Scopes trial. (Grebstein 1)

A Civic Biology: Presented in Problems is the textbook which John T. Scopes used to teach evolution doctrine in his biology classes. Even though evolution proffers a biological history in which man shares ancestry with other animals, apes specifically, the textbook that Scopes employs has a curious means of navigating that connection. Indeed, the language and rhetoric used in the text is rather cautious and aware of the precarious territory it treads. An excerpt from the text, reads

... Man's Place in Nature. -- Although we know that man is separated mentally by a wide gap from all other animals, in our study of physiology we must ask where to place man [...] anatomically there is a greater difference between the lowest type of monkey and the highest type of ape than there is between the highest type of ape and the lowest savage. (Grebstein 28)

There is no falsehood in the assertion that man possesses greater mental acuity than its relatives, but there is loaded rhetoric present as far as the comparison between the highest order of ape and the unexplained category of the "lowest savage."

It is with clear purpose that the textbook details the wide gap between man and ape, but posits a much smaller gap

between the highest of apes and supposed savages. Further into the text, there is a segment that states that

... at present time there exist upon the earth five races or varieties of man, each very different from the other in instincts, social customs and, to an extent, in structure. There are the Ethiopian or negro type, originating in Africa; the Malay or brown race, from the islands of the Pacific, the American Indian; the Mongolian or yellow race, including the natives of China, Japan and the Eskimos; and finally, the highest type of all, the Caucasians represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America.

(Grebstein 30)

While the textbook goes to great lengths to present a carefully curated approach to evolution, it inherits the same pitfalls that frame the monogenist and polygenist debate about racial stratification. I conclude that there seems to be an awareness of this caveat, which is why evolution was suddenly being eschewed while Christianity was once again being embraced.

The Scopes trial would proceed from July 10th until July 21st of 1925. The trial received national attention as the media sensationalized the rather brief proceedings.

Although the surface of the excitement is rooted in the presence of an all-star prosecutor and well known defense attorney battling over a contentious subject, the greater attention seemed to rest with the implications of the verdict. The resolution achieved at the end of the trial led to a guilty verdict being leveled against Scopes along with a \$100 fine. Two years later, on January 14th, 1927, the Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Butler act, but reversed the guilty verdict that Scopes incurred because of a technicality regarding the imposition of the fine (Grebstein 2).

Ultimately, evolution suffered a momentary defeat, but White America was able to maintain its position of power through the preservation of Christian doctrine. It is from this historical context that Lovecraftian horror is birthed: a response to the dread of a White identity crisis, framed by the furor of academic debates and legal challenges. It is between those battle cries where Lovecraft's voice is heard, speaking not to the feverish effort to reinforce White supremacy, but to the fear of what may come if the White identity is subsumed by a new definition of human.

The short story, "Dagon", written in 1917 and published in 1923, is among the first of Lovecraft's stories to broach the matter of the human identity in relations to evolution and ontology. What makes Dagon a useful tale to analyze is how well it blends contemporaneous scientific theory into the narrative in order to create a sense of believability. That is to say, the terror in Dagon is not derived solely from the monster in the tale, but from the real life parallel being drawn in the narrative.

Dagon presents the account of an unnamed protagonist's journey across an atramentous landmass and the subsequent discovery of an ancient stone monolith that reveals a nightmarish human history. Of an image found on the surface of said monolith, the narrator states,

... I think that these things were supposed to depict men--at least, a certain sort of men; though the creatures were shewn disporting like fishes in the waters of some marine grotto [...] they were damnably human in general outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips [...] and other unpleasant features [...] curiously enough, they seemed to have been chiseled badly out of proportion [...] one of the creatures was shewn in the act of killing a

whale represented as but little larger than himself.

(Lovecraft 6, 7)

Dismissively, the narrator surmises that the seeming inaccuracy is attributable to the rendering of

... imaginary gods of some primitive fishing or seafaring tribe; some tribe whose last descendant had perished eras before the first ancestor of the Piltdown or Neanderthal. Taking a moment to reflect upon the discovery of something that links modern man to their ancestors, the narrator notes that he is "awestruck at this unexpected glimpse into a past beyond the conception of the most daring anthropologist."

(Lovecraft 7, 8)

The protagonist's pensive moment is an ephemeral one, as the tale concludes with the nameless adventurer being afflicted with madness after enduring a harrowing encounter with one of the aeons old entities that worships the monolith idol (Lovecraft 8).

From the outset, this story provides an initial glimpse into several reoccurring themes in Lovecraft's works; monsters from the sea, humanoid hybrids and a revelation resulting in madness. These tropes appear, together or separately, in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", "The Call of

Cthulhu" and several other horror tales written by Lovecraft. The prevalence of those tropes alone provides sufficient motive to unpack their significance to this story and how fear is employed in the narrative. That these terrifying primordial monsters seem to dwell beneath the sea yet share humanlike features, is rather interesting. There seems to be some correlation between the act of submersion and surfacing, and the recovery of old fossils. Were one to substitute water for soil, and surfacing from the depths of the ocean with exhumation, what remains are two comparable occurrences. This parallel is afforded greater clarity when the narrator's initial assumption is brought into the juxtaposition. The narrator initially thought that the creatures carved into the monolith were some ancient form of man that predated the Piltdown. This does not seem to be a wasted reference, but a nuanced allusion to the discovery of the Piltdown bones. When the story's narrator comes to understand the gravity of what he has seen, he is driven utterly insane. It would then seem that Lovecraft is suggesting that in discovering the Piltdown man, humanity is at risk of being driven to madness by the weight of the revelation that comes with such a find.



Lovecraft's choice to depict the antagonist of Dagon as being partly monster and vaguely human, seems to be a conscious effort to allude to the Piltdown Man, which is similarly part man and part beast. Not only does that parallel speak to the realities forming at that time, but it speaks to Lovecraft's own perceptions of race. Lovecraft has a proclivity for viewing non-Whites as beast-like. During a tarry in New York City, Lovecraft is thrust into the midst of multi-racial setting in which his bitter feelings were brought to the surface. Lovecraft rants that he "was jostled by [...] 'hideous negroes that resemble gigantic chimpanzees.'" (Houellebecq 106) After visiting the Southern home of writer Robert Barlow, Lovecraft commented that "they can't let niggers use the beach at a Southern resort--can you imagine sensitive persons bathing near a pack of chimpanzees?" (Houellebecq 108) As conveyed in his own words, Lovecraft views Black people as animals. With such a seething hatred of Blacks it is understandable why the thought of sharing a direct relation with Blacks would be a maddening thought for Lovecraft as it is for the rest of White society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IT'S A HUMAN RACE AND WE'RE ALL LOSING

Prevalent within Lovecraft's canon are two dilemmas that are derived from the racist zeitgeist that defined early twentieth century America: miscegenation and ontology. Stemming from the racially motivated apprehensions caused by the debate about evolution and its impact on race relations, I refer to these dilemmas as Lovecraft's Tygers, so named because each dilemma is part of a binary which represents the fearful symmetry of racial integration.

In Lovecraftian horror, miscegenation is a horror theme. In her text, Scientific Racism, Character and American Fiction, Cathy Boeckmann explains that

... the most powerful aspect of scientific racism -- the use of physical difference to prove racial inferiority -- was the least directly argued. The relationship between physical form and racial/cultural characteristics was never conclusively proven, but it was widely assumed [...] the equation between outer and inner that was a cornerstone of White supremacy, and

which was used to argue the absolute inferiority of African Americans, was unsettled by the mixing of physical signs of race. (30)

In other words, miscegenation erases the physical markers that enable racists to easily identify and stratify people. As stated in chapter one of this essay, Lovecraft wrestles with the idea of race mixing as being a sort of erasure or genetic annihilation. This fear is quite visible in his works.

In an analysis of Lovecraft's story, "The Dunwich Horror", Michael Houellebecq notes that

... Lovecraft goes back to a very ancient source of horror where Evil is the product of a carnal union against nature. This idea fits his obsessive racism perfectly; for, to him, as to all racists, it is not one particular race that represents true horror, but the notion of the half-breed. (112)

During Lovecraft's protracted stay in New York, Lovecraft often complained to his friends about his encounters with "greasy sneering half-castes" and "monstrous half-breeds [that] skip about rolling on their heels absurdly" (Houellebecq 106). Lovecraft's vitriolic rhetoric is not

limited to correspondence with friends, but is also present in his stories:

... it must be stated unequivocally that in his stories the role of the victim is generally played by an Anglo-Saxon university professor who is refined, reserved, and well-educated. Someone who, in fact, is rather like himself. As for the torturers, servants of innumerable cults, they are almost always half-breeds, mulattos, of mixed blood, among the basest of species. (Houellebecq 109)

Ontology is treated with a measure of indifference that is meant to illustrate the terror of an abstruse universe by calling attention to the seemingly inconsequential nature of mankind's existence. However, careful scrutiny of this thematic element reveals that the expressed indifference in these fictive narratives belies a racist conversation that hearkens back to the polygenist argument that human variation is a matter of disparate origins amongst the races of man. An August 18th, 1916 letter addressed to the Kleicomolo collective (a coterie named after the members of the group; Kleiner, Lovecraft, Cole and Moe) summarizes Lovecraft's empiricist view of human existence. Lovecraft states that

... Science can trace our world to its source; to the moment of its birth from the great solar nebula in the remote past [...] we find the nebular form is the present condition of all creation -- a condition which precludes the existence of life. Therefore we are able to comprehend that the human race is but a thing of the moment. (Joshi, Schultz 53)

In sum, Lovecraft concludes that human life is unimportant due to its ephemeral place in the history of the cosmos. Curiously, this outlook does not negate Lovecraft's willingness to discover some purpose in life. Lovecraft remarks

... I desire to know approximately what my life is in terms of history -- human, terrestrial, solar, and cosmical [...] in what way, through what agency, and to what extent, the obvious guiding forces of creation act upon me and govern my existence. And if there be any less obvious forces, I desire to know them and their relation to me as well. (Joshi, Schultz 58, 59)

Even though Lovecraft argues that he is a nihilist, he still has a fascination with understanding his own origins. Just as the polygenist scholars sought to determine that human ontological relationships are disparate, so does

Lovecraft. However, it is the discovery of one's genealogy that can lead to the horrific realization of unwanted ancestors.

The remainder of this chapter will be spent applying the Tygers and unpacking the signifiers found in two specific Lovecraft texts; "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" and "Herbert West Re-Animator". My approach will consist of an examination of Lovecraft's handling of miscegenation and race in Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and how it features thematic elements consistent with the racist assumptions and fears mentioned in the first chapter of this essay. Next, I will address how Lovecraft deals with ontology and the polygenist debate, through a curated reading of "Herbert West Re-Animator".

### Miscegenation

The long standing American social more known as the one drop rule, dictates that if there is even one non-White relative in your family line, then your entire line is deemed to be impure. Much of this logic seems to be rooted in the erasure of the White identity when a White is mixed with a non-White. To that end, the existence of the

Piltdown seems to present an impasse in that it perpetuates the question of whether or not the entire White race now has an ancestor that taints their entire lineage in accordance with the one drop standard. Lovecraft appears to wrestle with this uncertainty in his short story, "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family".

According to the renowned Lovecraft scholar, S.T. Joshi, "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn" is "one of Lovecraft's first tales of 'hereditary degeneration' -- the suggestion that the protagonist is directly descended from a Darwinian 'beast'" (Lovecraft 12). The short tale in question was first published in *Weird Tales* magazine in 1921, under the title of "The White Ape," a name that Lovecraft loathed but perhaps aptly describes the story's parallel to the Piltdown Man discovery, which is itself a Darwinian curiosity that troubled the genealogy of mankind's family tree. (Lovecraft 12)

Arthur Jermyn details the tracing of the peculiar line of the Jermyn family, starting with the eldest in the line, Wade Jermyn. Wade is an anthropologist that ventures into the Congo in search of proof that White people were once native inhabitants of the Congo region of Africa.

Wade Jermyn, was one of the earliest explorers of the Congo region, and had written eruditely of its tribes, animals, and supposed antiquities...his bizarre conjectures on a prehistoric White Congolese civilization earned him much ridicule. (Lovecraft 13)

The story establishes that Wade sought to draw an ancestral connection between White people and a region of the world that is historically associated with a native Black population. In doing so, the story appears to echo elements of Darwinian thought through the notion of a common point of origin (a shared ancestral) for Whites and Blacks.

The Jermyn family line is then said to have developed a set of rather peculiar features following Sir Wade's trip to the Congo. Whilst in Africa, Wade met a "Portuguese" woman whom bore him a son. Subsequent to the birth of Wade's son, the

... Jermyns never seemed to look quite right -- something was amiss, though Arthur was the worst, and the old family portraits in Jermyn House shewed fine faces enough before Sir Wade's time. (Lovecraft 13)

In a rather explicit fashion, this passage conveys the presence of a visible taint derived from the sexual encounter between Wade Jermyn and the mysterious



"Portuguese" woman. Furthermore, this taint is shown to not merely be damaging to the individuals engaged in the initial act, but seems to affect the entire family line. With each new generation in the Jermyn family, the family line becomes increasingly animalistic in both appearance and behavior. This move toward atavism is reminiscent of Madison Grant's argument that interracial mixing would lead to a less evolved form over time.

Philip Jermyn, the son of Wade Jermyn, is characterized as "densely stupid and given to brief periods of uncontrollable violence." Additionally, Philip had a "reputation for feats of strength and climbing [...]", qualities typically associated with apes. (Lovecraft 14) Philip's son, Robert, is incited to a violent rage after a meeting with an explorer named Samuel Seaton. Samuel shared with Robert a manuscript that contained information about the legends of the Onga tribe, which spoke of an ancient African civilization of white apes. After some further discussion with Samuel, Robert proceeded to murder Seaton and then took the lives of his own children. (Lovecraft 15,16) The content of Robert and Samuel's discussion is never revealed in the narrative, but the connection between Samuel's manuscript and Wade Jermyn's own adventure to find

such a civilization seems to suggest some correlation is made that is not to Robert's liking. One may infer that Samuel concluded that there is truth to the Onga legend and that the Jermyns may be living proof of that claim. Hence, Robert's decision to murder Seaton may be perceived as an effort to conceal the truth from the outside world. The murder of his own children may then represent some sort of penance to rectify the diffusion of tainted genes. Robert's grandson, Alfred, is similarly described as violent and animalistic; During a circus sparring encounter gone awry, with a gorilla, the spectators

... did not expect to hear Sir Alfred Jermyn emit a shrill, inhuman scream, or to see him seize his clumsy antagonist with both hands, dash it to the floor of the cage and bite fiendishly at its hairy throat.

(Lovecraft 16).

What is seen thus far is the degradation of the human qualities in the family. With each younger member in the Jermyn line, there seems to be some recessive trait that gradually rises to the surface and expresses itself through increasingly violent and beast-like behavior. With the final member of the Jermyn family, Arthur, these beastly qualities manifest, not in the form of primitive and

violent behavior toward others, but in the form of a less-than-human countenance.

Continuing the work of his forefathers, Arthur also investigated the truth behind the arcane civilization of white apes that were said to dwell in the Congo. With fervent effort, Arthur is able to obtain a box that is said to have contained the mummified remains of the white ape princess of the ancient Congolese kingdom. Such remains would prove the existence not only of the mysterious Congolese civilization, but would also affirm the existence of the elusive white ape species that held dominion over this hidden kingdom. What Arthur found when he opened the box was an answer he did not seek.

The stuffed goddess was a nauseous sight [...] it was clearly a mummified white ape of some unknown species, less hairy than any recorded variety, and infinitely nearer mankind [...] two salient particulars must be told, for they fit in revoltingly with certain notes of Sir Wade Jermyn's African expeditions and with the Congolese legends of the white god and the ape-princess. The two particulars in question are these: the arms on the golden locket about the creature's neck were the Jermyn arms, and the jocose suggestion of M.

Verhaeren about a certain resemblance as connected with the shriveled face applied with vivid, ghastly, and unnatural horror to none other than the sensitive Arthur Jermyn, great-great-great-grandson of Sir Wade Jermyn and an unknown wife. (Lovecraft 20)

Confronted with the corpse of his great-great-great-grandmother and the revelation that he himself is descended from this hybrid ape, Arthur resolves to end his life via immolation.

A stable boy saw Arthur Jermyn, glistening from head to foot with oil and redolent of that fluid, steal furtively out and vanish on the black moor surrounding the house. Then in an exaltation of supreme horror, everyone saw the end. A spark appeared on the moor, a flame arose and a pillar of human fire reached to the heavens. The house of Jermyn was no more. (Lovecraft 19, 20)

In setting himself ablaze, Arthur Jermyn effectively lynches himself. Though lynching typically invokes the image of being hung from a tree, lynching also included other acts of torture such as genital mutilation, dismemberment and even being lit on fire. Lynching, though not exclusively used against non-Whites, is a practice most often associated with race motivated violence enacted

against Blacks for a number of reasons, including miscegenation. The parallel between Arthur's actions and real life lynching is evinced by the lynching of Jesse Washington, whom was beaten, castrated and hanged over a fire after being doused in gasoline, all because of the poorly proven accusation that he had raped a White woman. Though miscegenation is presented in the story to have such a dreadful effect that it inspires murder and suicide, the implications present in the story do not end with the Jermyn family being the product of miscegenation. The more complex consequence of Arthur's discovery is the knowledge that all White people are shown to be the descendants of these hybrid ape creatures that rule the Congo.

The opening passage of Arthur Jermyn offers a rhetorical statement that foreshadows the story's dramatic revelation, while invoking the very woe brought on by the discovery of the Piltdown Man.

... Science, already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species -- if separate species we be-- for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be born by mortal brains if loosed upon the world. (Lovecraft 12)

As observed by S.T. Joshi and David Schultz

... the narrator's opening comment, in particular the clause 'if separate species we be,' is a generalized statement that does not logically follow if we are to assume that it is only the Jermyn line that has been tainted by a white ape in its ancestry; instead, the implication appears to be that the Congolese city discovered by Sir Wade Jermyn is the source for all White civilization. To a racist like HPL, this would have been the acme of horror. (Joshi, Schultz 89-90)

Among the points of interest about Joshi and Schultz's observation, the critical points are the recovery of the remains of a hybrid ape and the revelation that Whites descend from apes. The parallel being drawn seems clear: the White ape signifies the Piltdown Man while the Jermyn family represents White society. Just as the remains of the Piltdown are of a hybrid ape origin and fortify the Darwinian claim that all humans descend from some common ape ancestor, so do the remains of the White ape from the hidden Congolese civilization. This places Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn in the midst of the discourse surrounding the Piltdown Man and evolution.

The story shadows, if not reimagines, the same events, capturing the fear that White society exhibits over the possibility of sharing any blood with Africans.

### Ontology

"Herbert West Re-Animator" is on its surface a parody of Mary Shelly's Frankenstein, invoking many similar themes and scenarios. However, beyond what is happening in the narrative on a shallow level, there is an ideological striving between a belief in hard science and the acceptance of said science when new discoveries undermine previous beliefs. Though the story that seems to revolve around the philosophical question of whether or not man has a soul and if there is more to our existence than this world, there is a portion of the story that markedly draws upon the polygenist argument that not all humans share the same origin. It is this sliver of the narrative that I believe offers the most profound insight into an otherwise facile reproduction of a more famous work.

Herbert West's machinations begin at the Miskatonic University Medical School where West is seeking to prove that life is without meaning by demonstrating that living

beings are the sum of a biochemical process. The narrator states that

... [West's] views, which were widely ridiculed by the faculty and his fellow-students, hinged on the essentially mechanistic nature of life; and concerned means for operating the organic machinery of mankind by calculated chemical action after the failure of natural processes. (Lovecraft 33)

The narrator then proceeds to elaborate on West's clinical outlook on existence.

Holding with Haeckel that all life is a chemical and physical process, and that the so-called 'soul' is a myth, [Herbert] believed that artificial reanimation of the dead can depend only on the condition of the tissues[...] a corpse fully equipped with organs may with suitable measures be set going again in the peculiar fashion known as life. (Lovecraft 33)

If biological process is mechanistic and the soul is purely mythological, then it would seem that the story suggests that there is no higher order to living, as life is understood as being the result of naturally occurring biological processes.



West's position parallels that of Lovecraft himself, who expressed a similar sentiment in a letter to Maurice W. Moe. In said letter, Lovecraft states,

... I have seen nothing which could possibly give me the notion that cosmic force is the manifestation of a mind and will like my own infinitely magnified; a potent and purposeful consciousness which deals individually and directly with the miserable denizens of a wretched little flyspeck on the back door of a microscopic universe, and which singles this putrid excrescence out as the one spot whereto to send an onlie-begotten [sic] Son, whose mission is to redeem those accursed flyspeck-inhabiting lice which we call human beings. (Lovecraft 59)

Lovecraft's diatribe about a lack of evidence for a "cosmic force" that is the manifestation of a higher power is a clear attack on the existence of a soul created by a divine source. The correlation between Lovecraft's assertion and the position taken by West in the story is that each view highlights the supposedly inconsequential nature of human existence. In the absence of a verifiable divine purpose, West, much like Lovecraft, sees no intrinsic value to human

life. Despite this absolutist position, there is a caveat to this world-view;

Lovecraft found that the most powerful way to express his philosophy in literary terms was through what he termed cosmicism. Cosmicism is the idea that given the vastness of the universe, both in space and in time, the human race (now no longer regarded as the special creation of a divine being) is of complete inconsequence in the universe-at-large, although it may well be of some importance on the earthly scale. (Joshi 12)

There is a modicum of conceit within the Lovecraft's apathy that recognizes that human interaction does have some measure of importance, even if that importance is only on a human scale rather than a cosmic one. It is with regard to that caveat that Herbert West Re-Animator ventures into exploring the one way in which human interaction matters; determining if humans all share the same origin.

During the act of reanimating a recently deceased workman, Herbert West's nameless companion states

... I, and myself, still held some curious notions about the traditional 'soul' of man, and felt an awe at the secrets that might be told by one returning from the

dead. I wondered what sights [...] might have [been] seen in inaccessible spheres, and what could [be related by those] fully restored to life. (Lovecraft 35)

The narrator explains that his consideration is somewhat reserved as he does share some of the same materialistic views as West. However, the fact that the narrator's interest in the soul is aroused at all is telling in and of itself.

The question of what sights and knowledge may exist beyond the realm of the living is not nearly as important as the underlying motivator that seems to have inspired that question in the first place. Herbert West's singular goal is to affirm his claim that life is mechanical and not divine. Confirming the opposite, that life may be more than mechanical, seems to have an unspoken yet present and illustrated importance in the story. The desire to know if the soul is real seems to be tethered to a related concern that may offer some clarity as to what human concern matters enough to lead the story's narrator to consider ontological possibilities that do not align with the conventions of nihilism.

Continuing on with their experimentation, West and his assistant acquire the corpse of a Black American amateur

boxer by the name of Buck "The Harlem Smoke" Robinson. In describing the phenotype of the corpse, the narrator expresses that

... the negro had been knocked out, and a moment's examination shewed us that he would permanently remain so. He was a loathsome, gorilla-like thing, with abnormally long arms which I could not help calling fore legs, and a face that conjured up thoughts of unspeakable Congo secrets and tom-tom poundings under an eerie moon. (Lovecraft 44)

Likening the corpse of Buck Robinson to that of a gorilla highlights not only a Darwinian parallel between man and ape, but also communicates the racism within the narrative. The narrator compromises his position of nihilism by expressing such an utterance, revealing that there are aspects of human life that are important to the narrator, particularly, when it comes to how race is viewed.

Looking to the narrator's revulsion at the sight of the corpse, it is obvious that the narrator views the lifeless form of Buck Robinson as something other than human, or at least something separate from himself. These feelings stem not from the sight of the decrepit corpse itself, but from the racial affiliation of the corpse. This sense of

separation is made apparent when the narrator discusses the troubles that he and West experienced with their effort to reanimate Robinson's corpse.

Ghastly as our prize appeared, it was wholly unresponsive to every solution we injected in its black arm; solutions prepared from experience with white specimens only. (Lovecraft 44)

The above passage clearly denotes a distinction between Black people and White people that is intrinsic, even if unexplained. But the reasoning is understood: Blacks are not human where as Whites are human.

Requiring a different chemical solution in order to successfully animate the corpse of a Black person suggests that there is some innate biological difference between Blacks and Whites that prevents the serum from functioning as intended. It is plausible that the biological difference being hinted at is connected to the perception of Black people as ape-like and inhuman, thus making them a separate species from White people. In fact, an earlier passage in the story explains that the serum to animate animals is different from the serum used to animate humans;

... It likewise became clear that, since the same solution never worked alike on different organic species, he would require human subjects for further and more specialized progress. (Lovecraft 33)

From the above passages it becomes apparent both from foreshadowing and illustration that the common thread of the narrative is the polygenist argument that Blacks and Whites are not of the same species.

One may opt to read Herbert West Re Animator as a spoof of Mary Shelly's Frankenstein, which is a common reading of the complete narrative, but such an interpretation would lose much of the richness that may be drawn out of the text by observing the fine details and statements that function within a discourse outside of the narratives events. Whilst the narrative plays heavily upon Frankenstein, there is more than an inter-textual reference in play. The characters' search for answers through scientific validation is not dissimilar from Lovecraft's.

In his quest for knowledge and perfection, [Lovecraft] hopes to find an answer to all questions in science, and sees in this castle of truth the key to ultimate happiness. (Schweitzer 37)

It is perhaps ironic then that for a man ardently in favor of scientific pursuit as a means of obtaining validity for his views, that science and its revelations would complicate his racist understanding.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MADDER THAN THE HATTER

The social-stratification between White people and Black people in 1920s American society can be summarily defined by the following observation made by Cathy Boeckmann.

... As Marion Dawson put it in 1901, in the postwar South social engineers endeavored to 'maintain a social barrier across which no alien foot should come, and preserve at all hazards Anglo-Saxon ascendancy.' As this formulation suggests, defenses of the color line often took on supremacist logic; the white race was superior, but it was necessary to prevent alien individuals from invading or defiling that superiority. And the implied threat to superiority in this and most other cases was the prospect of miscegenation. According to scientific understanding of racial difference, when white blood mingled with that of other races the resulting offspring were inferior to the white parent. (Boeckmann 13)



As illustrated by Boeckmann's assertions, the preservation of the White identity is directly concerned with complete separation of Whiteness from Blackness, both in the physical sense and in the biological sense. Achieving separation in the physical sense was easy enough as this was carried out through a series of de facto and de jure policies known as Jim Crow. Biological separation had seemingly been attended to through the application of anti-miscegenation laws, but few, if any, could have ever prepared for the advent of Darwinian rhetoric nor the seemingly irrefutable evidence to support said rhetoric, as found in the bones of the Piltdown Man. The aforementioned scientific curiosities, in tandem, invalidated any such effort to maintain the more crucial form of separation, the biological separation of races.

If simple interracial mixing is considered enough to dilute the blood of a supposedly pure race, then the claim of a common ancestor for all people means that dilution is a trivial concern when direct relation is now being implied. The assumption of Whiteness owing to a sui generis origin and humanity distinct to Whites was quickly being unraveled by the very same science that had purported the supposed bestial nature of Black people. The hybrid man-ape

bones of the Piltdown Man affirmed Darwin's theory that all men descend from apes, consequently creating an undesired connection between White people and Black people, as Black people were long claimed by science to be some lower caste with visible ape-like traits. In other words, Darwin's claims meant that everyone is related to an ape and thus, to one another.

As noted earlier in the essay, Howard Phillips Lovecraft predicted, with astounding accuracy, that a withdrawal to familiar beliefs is likely to occur when man is faced with the bitter realities of scientific advance (Schweitzer 36). That White society was clearly retreating to venerable traditions rather than confront the truths presented by science affirms Lovecraft's astute postulation. At the same time, Lovecraft himself wrestled with the complications of balancing the dread of new scientific discoveries with his own ideological leanings. This struggle is particularly difficult for Lovecraft as he is a self-proclaimed materialist. However, as understood by the analysis of Lovecraft's fiction and non-fiction works in the second chapter, Lovecraft seems to be willing to consider ideological positions outside of his ordinary purview while grappling with a means to navigate the hard

realities of science. Dirk Mosig argues that Lovecraft's position on social-norms and traditional values allow that

... man must live by the relative values imparted by culture and tradition, and from these he derives an illusion of security and stability. These values and traditions Lovecraft accepted as long as they did not contradict what his cold, rational intellect knew to be true. (Schweitzer 35)

Mosig further argues that

... [Lovecraft's] pessimistic prophecy was justified becomes evident when we witness the growing interest in, or rather, retreat to, the occult, astrology, magic, religion, witchcraft, and superstitions [...] all the frantic attempts at regaining some of the lost security destroyed by Galileo, and Darwin, and Freud, and Einstein. (Schweitzer 36, 37)

All of the knowledge that science has granted has not empowered Lovecraft but rather frightened him with the staggering realization that the world is not how he understood it to be. Knowledge of what may be is so terrifying that Lovecraft would rather adhere to what once was.

Fritz Lieber offers a similar, yet more humanizing argument about Lovecraft and his struggles with the horrors of scientific discovery and cosmicism.

... In his personal life Lovecraft met the challenge of this hideous realization by taking refuge in traditionalism, in the cultivation of mankind's time-honored manners and myths, not because they are true, but because man's mind is habituated to them and therefore finds in them some comfort and support.

(Schweitzer 7)

The fear of realizing mankind's unimportance as well as the fear of what other horrors science could unleash upon humanity, take an observable toll on Lovecraft.

Effectively, cosmicism and other traditions became a sort of escape for Lovecraft, who seems unable to deal with his own deep hatred of non-Whites, as well as the unnerving resolution reached by the discovery of the Piltdown Man, implying an ancestral relation between himself and these people that he found utterly detestable.

Michael Houellebecq clarifies that

... Lovecraft had in fact always been a racist. But in his youth this racism did not go beyond what was acceptable within his social class--that of puritanical

Protestant old bourgeoisie of New England [...] but Lovecraft was forced to live in New York, where he came to know hatred, disgust, and fear, otherwise stimulating sentiments. And it was in New York that his racist opinions turned into a full-fledged racist neurosis. (Houellebecq 105)

No longer residing in the safe confines of his small New England dwelling in Rhode Island, Lovecraft was exposed to a far greater number of ethnic minorities than he would have ever fathomed would be present in one place at one time where Whites also dwell. Though minorities were still kept separated from Whites in housing and most job sites, encountering a non-White was still very likely in a large city such as New York.

In a missive to his colleague Belknap Long, Lovecraft describes the metropolitan area of the Lower East Side and its minority inhabitants in a disturbing yet familiar fashion

... The organic things--Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid-inhabiting the awful cesspool could no by any stretch of the imagination be call'd human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous

slime of earth's corruption, and slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities. They--or the degenerate gelatinous fermentation of which they were composed--seem'd to ooze, seep and trickle thro' the gaping cracks in the horrible houses [...] and I thought of some avenue of Cyclopean and unwholesome vats, crammed to the vomiting point with gangrenous vileness, and about to burst and inundate the world in one leprous cataclysm of semi-fluid rottenness.

(Houellebecq 106, 107)

What seems to be a passage straight from one of Lovecraft's horror tales is in fact a genuine piece of communication with a friend. The description given by Lovecraft confirms my earlier reasoning that the portrayal of the creatures in Lovecraft's stories is meant to symbolize the product of miscegenation and the othered nature of non-Whites. This symbolism is exemplified in a letter in which Lovecraft describes non-Whites as a disturbing chimera-like creature. Houellebecq says as much in his own analysis of the letter.

Indisputably great Lovecraftian prose. But what race could possibly have provoked this outburst? He himself

no longer knew; at one point he mentions the 'Italico-Semitico-Mongoloids.' The ethnic realities at play had long been wiped out; what is certain is that he hated them all and was incapable of any greater specificity. (Houllebecq 107)

What is made apparent is that Lovecraft's racism greatly evolved over time. Lovecraft went from comparing Blacks to chimpanzees, and disparaging other non-Whites as alien, to comparing them to demonic monsters, the same kind of monsters that are prominently featured in his horror stories. To this end, Lovecraft seems to have developed a sense of nihilism, not from the belief that the universe is too vast to understand, but as a reaction to a sense of hopelessness about his existence. The weight of the revelations brought about by science had begun to take their toll on Lovecraft's sanity, which I argue is realized through one of Lovecraft's latter day fictive tales, *The Call of Cthulhu*, in which the price of knowledge and understanding is one's sanity.

There are a number of key similarities between *Dagon*, which was written a decade earlier, and *The Call of Cthulhu*. Both stories feature a protagonist that uncovers a dark truth from the past. Both stories feature a diabolic

nightmare raised from the deep, and both stories culminate in the protagonist losing their sanity in the face of a new discovery. Perhaps most interesting is the evolution of the antagonist, which seems to mirror the evolution of Lovecraft's perception of non-Whites. The deep-ones from "Dagon" and "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" are given to a humanoid appearance with negroid-like features meshed with an amphibious tinge. Even though the deep-ones are portrayed as inhuman, the protagonist does initially mistake the deep-ones for being some sort of hominid. By contrast, Cthulhu is unmistakably inhuman, with physical features so alien and bizarre that to merely look upon Cthulhu will bring madness. "Call of Cthulhu" seems to be a reworking of Dagon in which the price of knowledge is shown to be far graver than Lovecraft had fathomed.

The axiom that declares that knowledge is power is turned upon its head by Lovecraft, who professes a much more sinister element to the acquisition of knowledge. Rather than knowledge illuminating the dark corners of ignorance, knowledge may reveal a truth far worse than what the darkness of ignorance has obscured. Returning to the analysis in chapter one in which the story of Dagon parallels the unearthing of the Piltdown Man, it can be



argued that from the perspective shown in Lovecraftian horror, knowledge is dreadful and even damning, not because knowledge is intrinsically terrible, but because knowing too much can do irreparable harm. This danger is why the protagonist of *Dagon* is driven to madness by his discoveries. Dirk W. Mosig observes the fact that

Lovecraft has been often misunderstood [...] as opposing scientific progress. Nothing could have been further removed from his intention. He simply stated what he perceived as the inevitable and deplorable consequence of man's inability to cope with the new horizons opened by science, while still regarding knowledge as the ultimate good. (Schweitzer 36)

According to scholar Dirk W. Mosig,

... Lovecraft was a mechanistic materialist, influenced by Haeckel, but going far beyond the 19th Century rationalist. [Lovecraft] was an ardent believer and supporter of science and [the] scientific method. (Schweitzer 34)

Although Lovecraft embraced science and empiricism as the only rational and logical means of understanding the world in which he lived, Lovecraft's sense of a forlorn human

existence is in part due to that adherence to scientific pursuit. Lovecraft

... had little faith in man's ability to cope with reality, and in his brilliant letters and fiction predicted what we now call 'future shock.' With deep regret he prophesied man's retreat into insanity or the superstitions of a new dark age when faced with the new discovers of science pointing toward the abysmal insignificance of man. (Schweitzer 36)

Factual knowledge, from Lovecraft's perspective, is the highest order of understanding, but knowledge also comes with the price of uncovering truths that loosen mankind's fragile grip on reality and understanding. That many of Lovecraft's works feature a character that slays themselves when they discover the truth, or are driven to madness when facing some manifestation of the truth, speaks to the perplexing struggle that Lovecraft seems to have with scientific knowledge. Scientific truth may be held in high regard by Lovecraft, but that same knowledge in Lovecraft's stories is shown to be just as dangerous, if not more so, than the comfort of blithe ignorance to science's numerous revelations.

The Darwinian discourse of the 1920s epitomizes such an instance in which society is unable to cope with the vicissitudes of ontological understanding as demystified by science. Lovecraft himself believed in the veracity of Darwin's claims. Mosig notes that "[Lovecraft] was convinced of the validity of Darwin's theory of evolution." (Schweitzer 34) Lovecraft's conviction for evolutionary theory is even noted as being consciously employed in his works. S.T. Joshi says of the short tale "Rats in the Walls" that

... the spectacularly rapid descent of the narrator upon the evolutionary scale [is] a scenario that could only have occurred to a writer who had accepted the truth of the Darwinian Theory. (Joshi 10)

Yet, when one reads more of Lovecraft's works, it becomes clear that there is a sense of trepidation regarding science. Lovecraftian scholar, Fritz Leiber Jr., states that

... the universe of modern science engendered a profounder horror in Lovecraft's writings than that stemming solely from its tremendous distances and its highly probably alien and powerful non-human inhabitants. (Schwietzer 7)

In other words, though Lovecraft's tales are rife with preternatural entities and malefic deities, the true horror lie with the consequences of the truth: those things learned by man through the supposed infallibility of science. It is little wonder then that despite Lovecraft's feelings about pragmatism and materialism that Lovecraft's tales seem to feature characters that are punished or suffer for the things that they learn, no matter how valid.

"The Call of Cthulhu" is arguably Lovecraft's most well-known chronicle. The eponymous towering-dread from which the story derives its name symbolizes many of Lovecraft's sentiments about the unimportance of humanity and the fear of an indifferent universe. Cthulhu itself is a being so gruesome and inhuman in appearance that the very sight of it drives one to madness. Certainly, one may infer that since Christian faith asserts that man is made in the image of a loving God, that Lovecraft's portrayal of the Cthulhu presents a god that is the furthest thing from human, we do not bear its image, nor does it have any compassion for our existence. Indeed this speaks to the theosophical influences working in the text, as well as to Lovecraft's cosmicism, but such a reading is all too common. It is easy for one to read this work and focus on

the theosophical elements and the horror aspects of the tale, as many scholars have done, such as Robert M. Price, who devoted an entire text on the use of theosophy in Lovecraft's works (Joshi 30). Lovecraft himself was even influenced by theosophical works when writing "The Call of Cthulhu", the extent of which is seen in the narrative itself which makes a metacognitive reference to a real world theosophical text, "The Story of Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria" (Joshi 29). Rather than continue down the well-trodden path of a supernatural horror and theology reading, the reading offered in this thesis examines "The Call of Cthulhu" as a cautionary tale about the pursuit of knowledge, where knowledge is the true horror and the monster is simply a metaphor for that horror.

The structure of the story takes the reader through the narrator's journey of assembling bits and pieces of knowledge that will eventually lead him to an encounter with Cthulhu. It seems interesting that the story structure and events are focused on the gathering knowledge and the consequences of that knowledge, once found. Even the initial passage of the narrative provides sufficient evidence to support such a reading where knowledge is the true threat. Said passage states that

... The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little, but someday the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (Lovecraft 78, 79)

As argued in the passage above, knowledge in its own right is does little harm, but when seemingly disparate knowledge is amalgamated into a cohesive and related body of information, the revelation derived from this new knowledge will give rise to consternation or worse. Also, it is interesting to note that though the dangerous knowledge in "The Call of Cthulhu" is of cult rituals and a space-alien deity, the initial passage directly addresses the danger of science and its many discoveries. This point further demonstrates the viability of a reading of the text as a cautionary tale, while highlighting the way in which

Lovecraft's personal views seem to enter into the text without Lovecraft being directly inserted into the text.

"The Call of Cthulhu" begins with the chronicle of Francis Wayland Thurston, who is inspired to investigate the findings of his late grand-uncle, George Gammell Angell, after his sudden and mysterious death. Before the sequence of events are given, the reader is offered a warning from the narrator that

... like all dread glimpses of truth, flashed out from an accidental piecing together of separated things--in this case an old newspaper item and the notes of a dead professor. I hope that no one else will accomplish this piecing out; certainly, if I live, I shall never knowingly supply a link in so hideous a chain.

(Lovecraft 79)

It is made clear to the reader from this excerpt that this story is being presented as an exhortation to avoid the pursuit of knowledge. That is to say, that the narrator uses plain language to discourage the seeking out of connections between seemingly unrelated or loosely related facts, as they can create a terrible chain of events that create an awareness of things that are better left unknown.

The plot structure itself models the dangers of pursuing knowledge as conveyed through Wayland's venture to piece together each new bit of information that he finds, culminating in the detrimental discovery of Cthulhu. Wayland, being the sole heir and executor of his grand-uncle's estate is charged with going over the papers that his grand-uncle had left behind. While rifling through Angell's belongings, Wayland uncovered a series of discomposing notes on the dreams of a young sculptor and the account of a police inspector that engaged a pagan group known as the Cthulhu cult, as well as a statue in the shape of an odd dragon like creature. It is the esoteric nature of these findings that drives Wayland to seek out more knowledge. As stated in the narration

... Had my uncle in his latter years, become credulous of the most superficial impostures? I resolved to search out the eccentric sculptor responsible for this apparent disturbance of an old man's peace of mind.

(Lovecraft 79-80)

Presented above is the first bit of information that piques Wayland's curiosity. Disjointed notes and an unrecognizable artifact are seemingly innocuous enough, but seeking clarity as to what the notes mean and what the artifact is



a carving of, presents a danger for which Wayland is unprepared to face, which is why, in hindsight, he cautions the reader to be weary of doing as he has already done.

Wayland's investigation of his grand-uncle's manuscripts begins his precarious journey to amass knowledge and understanding of both his grand-uncle's death, and of the information that may have led to that death. In doing so, Wayland's exploits demonstrate the risks of deep inquiry into matters that are better left unknown. Wayland's grand-uncle's notes reveal that a sculptor named Henry Anthony Wilcox, whom is afflicted with dreams that inspired the carving of the unknown statue, is responsible for the bas-relief which had come into the possession of his grand-uncle (Lovecraft 80, 81). Angell is so intrigued by the odd statue that he presses Wilcox for an interview. Through the interview process, Wilcox revealed that he dreamt of the repeated phrase, "Cthulhu fhtagn", which triggered an old memory for Angell of a prior instance in which he had heard the phrase before (Lovecraft 82). Seventeen years prior to encountering Wilcox, Angell had attended an annual meeting of the American Archaeological Society, where Angell met Inspector John Raymond Legrasse. Legrasse, a policeman by profession,

is in attendance in order to gain information about an unknown artifact that he and his colleagues had acquired after a police raid of a pagan cult ceremony.

The artifact in question is similar in nature to the one that Angell would come to possess many years later. It is during Legrasse's account of this event that Angell first hears the phrase, "Ph'nglui mglw 'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah 'nagl fhtagn", the phrase that he would hear part of again, seventeen years later from Wilcox, establishing a connection between the two encounters (Lovecraft 85-88). As Wayland concludes his reading the manuscripts on the accounts of Wilcox and Legrasse, Wayland states that

... my uncle was excited by the tale of the sculptor I did not wonder for what thoughts must arise upon hearing, after a knowledge of what Legrasse had learned of the cult, of a sensitive young man who had dreamed not only the figure and exact hieroglyphics of the swamp-found image...but had had come in his dreams three of the precise words of the formula uttered alike by Esquiamau diabolists and mongrel Louisianans.

(Lovecraft 93)

In other words, Wayland's grand-uncle was enthused by the connections being drawn between what he knew of Legrasse's

old account and the new information he uncovered from Wilcox's account, each contributing to the illustration of a clearer picture. However, the clarity received from this refined perspective is not without a price.

Upon learning much of what his grand-uncle had discovered, Wayland recounts the events surrounding his grand-uncle's death. In particular, Wayland remembers his grand-uncle's encounter with an unknown black man who jostled him, shortly before he fell to the ground and expired. It may be inferred, and seems to be implied by the narrator, that the unknown assailant is a member of the clandestine Cthulhu-cult seeking to silence Angell because of what he knew. Wayland muses that

... I did not forget the mixed blood and marine pursuits of the cult-members in Louisiana, and would not be surprised to learn of secret methods and poison needles as ruthless and as anciently known as the cryptic rites and beliefs. Legrasse and his men...have been let alone; but in Norway a certain seaman who saw things is dead. Might not the deeper inquiries of my uncle after encountering the sculptor's data have come to sinister ears? I think Professor Angell died because he knew too much, or because he was likely to learn too much.

Whether I shall go as he did remains to be seen, for I have learned much now. (Lovecraft 95)

In unequivocal terms, the narrator makes palpable to the reader the perilous nature of pursuing too much knowledge. Wayland acknowledging that the acquisition of knowledge led to his grand-uncle being slain, while also realizing that the same fate may befall him for the same reason, conveys to the reader the magnitude of the narrator's exigent plea that none should probe too deeply into matters that they do not understand, lest they face dire consequences.

Furthermore, the narrator's words underscore the narrator's reoccurring warning about the dangers of knowledge seeking.

Though Wayland began to shy away from his pursuit, he claims that by mere chance he encountered a third piece of information that reinvigorated his interest in prying further into the matters of the odd statue he found amongst his uncle's belongings and the mysterious Cthulhu cult. By choosing to persist in his efforts rather than cease his pursuit, Wayland brings upon himself the terrible burden of the knowledge he will gain through his continued push for greater understanding. While visiting a friend who also serves as a museum curator, Wayland happens upon a photograph of a stone image that closely resembles the

statue found by Legrasse and his colleagues during their raid. Examining the item with greater attention, Wayland discovers that the image is accompanied by a newspaper article about a sailor named Gustaf Johansen, whom survives a sea battle with unknown assailants. What stands out about Johansen's account in the article is that in his struggle to survive, he and the remaining crew of his ship take the enemy's yacht, where he discovers a strange stone idol in the ship's cabin. According to the article, Johansen and the surviving crew were said to have come ashore on an island, where all but Johansen perished. When found, Johansen was extremely taciturn and nothing else was known about the events at sea (Lovecraft 96-98). Not satisfied with what he had learned from the article and its curious connection to what he had already learned from his grand-uncle's notes, Wayland ventured off to the last known address for Johansen.

When Wayland arrives at Johansen's home, he is greeted by Johansen's wife and is informed that Johansen suffered an unexpected death when a stack of papers fell from an attic window and caused him to fall to the ground. Upon a final examination by the coroner, it is concluded that there is no known cause for his death. This revelation

disturbed Wayland, as yet again, someone connected to information regarding the Cthulhu cult died from unknown and sudden causes. Indeed, this occurrence is consistent with the narrative's theme of the dangers of possessing or seeking too much knowledge. Additionally, through the drama of the deaths of those whom have acquired too much knowledge, the reader is also given a metaphoric perspective on the danger that knowledge poses, reminding the reader that the consequences for seeking knowledge are dire (Lovecraft 96-100).

Johansen's wife informs Wayland that her husband left behind a manuscript that is said to contain the true account of what occurred when he and his crew were at sea. Unable to speak with Johansen himself, and anxious to acquire another piece of the puzzle, Wayland manages to persuade Johansen's widow to give him access to the manuscript. Assuring Johansen's widow of his connection to the information contained within, the widow agrees and passes along the manuscript to Wayland. The portion of the events told in the newspaper article is confirmed by what Johansen states in his manuscript. Where there is a divergence in accounts is the matter of what occurred between Johansen capturing the enemy yacht and his crew

coming ashore on the island. While sailing further out into the sea, Johansen and his men notice a large stone pillar in the distance. Wanting to know the nature of the object, Johansen and his men sail in the direction of the pillar. Once they closed sufficient distance on the object, they noticed that near it was an unknown costal line of "mud, ooze and weedy Cyclopean masonry" (Lovecraft 100,101). Johansen and his men dock their vessel and proceed to explore the odd and inhuman structures. Before Johansen and his men were able to venture too deeply into the prodigious recondite structures, they were startled by an ominous sound the served as the prelude to the appearance of Cthulhu.

The narrative states that two of the crew died instantly of fright having laid eyes upon the colossal wretch. Three more were slain immediately by the swipe of one of Cthulhu's claws, sent end-over-end down a steep cliff. Only Johansen and one other remained as they made it to the boat. Before any further action could be taken, the remaining crew mate took sight of Cthulhu and is instantly driven to madness, subsequently followed by death. If one allows Cthulhu to serve as a metaphor for the truth, then the consequences suffered by the crew for finding the truth

are made quite clear. The fact that three members of the crew were driven mad correlates with Lovecraft's belief that humans are unable to cope with the truth. Furthermore, the principle argument of cosmicism is emphasized by the encounter, as the crew is faced with the sudden revelation that the vastness of the universe contains things far greater and darker than ever imagined by a human mind. There is no return to the halcyon days of believing that men are the highest order of beings, but are minute in comparison to a cold universe.

Johansen's manuscript concludes with his narrow escape from the devilish titan. Johansen manages to drive his vessel through Cthulhu's head causing it to burst and cease its pursuit. However, Cthulhu is not felled, only momentarily incapacitated as it drew its scattered flesh back together. The story itself concludes with Wayland now realizing he too will perish for having learned the truth. In closing, Wayland returns to where he began, praying that none shall follow his path, nor even accidentally come across what he had the misfortune of finding (Lovecraft 101-105).

Returning to an earlier point I raised, the initial passage has the narrator declaring that science, though by



no malicious intent or inherent fault, will lead to disaster should mankind manage to piece together bits of seemingly unrelated information. It is shown clearly through Wayland's adventure that combining pieces of information will lead to an unfortunate discovery. However, the emphasis on science stands out as the story itself does not address science any further than what is mentioned in the first passage. This oddly placed passage suggests the possibility that the narrative for the "The Call of Cthulhu" serves as a metaphor for the dangers of science. Science, presumably indifferent and only concerned with what is, is not unlike Cthulhu, which itself is indifferent. Truly understanding Cthulhu, much like truly understanding science, means that one risks facing a reality they do not wish to nor are able to address.

Lovecraft is said to have come up with the plot synopsis for "The Call of Cthulhu" during August of 1925, which was the month following the completion of the Scopes trial (Lovecraft 78). It would not be an unreasonable inference to suppose that the subject matter of the trial may have been fresh in Lovecraft's mind at the time. White society is at an impasse due to what was then understood to be definitive proof that humanity descended from apes. From

a simple observation and a few bones, a correlation is drawn that threatened to change all understanding of human development. Ultimately, science had betrayed the curious minds of men, delivering unto them a fact that is beyond comprehension. Given that struggle, it is again reasonable to infer that "The Call of Cthulhu" communicates the difficulty of that struggle, while also serving as a warning to cease such pursuits. The narrator even goes so far as to say that men would do better by their blithe ignorance than by their curious nature to know more. This interpretation is in sync with Lovecraft's own statements, as outlined earlier in this essay, demonstrating that Lovecraft does seem to be employing his texts as a means of addressing personal concerns.

With a potent hatred for minorities and a pronounced fear of an indifferent cosmos, Lovecraft's ideological and sociological positions are not as straight forward as Lovecraft expresses. Cosmicism may be an interesting means of reading some of Lovecraft's works, and it is certainly a dynamic perspective to apply to a metaphysics discussion. However, it seems reasonable to conclude that the greatest governing force in the life of Howard Phillips Lovecraft is simple fear. As a lifelong racist, an empiricist and a

reported believer in Darwin's theory of evolution, the conundrum presented by the discovery of the Piltdown Man would certainly have had a profound impact on Lovecraft. That Lovecraft's cosmicism seems to be frequently troubled by contradictory ideologies and considerations does not highlight confusion but rather suggests that Lovecraft may have preferred the notion of a dark and indifferent cosmos where life has no meaning to that of a world where the unintended cruelty of science gives meaning to that which some would rather be left unexplained.

Lovecraft's persistent use of vitriolic racist rhetoric both in personal correspondence and his fictional works makes clear the extent to which Lovecraft embraced White supremacy. Admitting to descending from an ape, which is thought by White supremacists to be the genesis of Black people, would mean the surrender of the position of White supremacy. No more would it matter if one were of Teutonic blood or from the British Isles. The privilege of Whiteness, the claim to being the sole human people of the planet, was lost the moment that Dawson initiated his infamous archaeological hoax. In that light, Lovecraft's cosmicism does in part seem to be reactionary to the stresses of such events. Interestingly enough, to have your

entire ethnic identity undermined by a few old bones does seem to affirm the notion that the universe is cruelly-indifferent, dark and cold.

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